

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN CHURCHES

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The place of preaching in the Church in the USSR

In the life of the Church in the Soviet Union, preaching has a definite place.

Before the revolution of October 1918 the Sunday services in most of the town churches included sermons. The sermons of famous preachers like Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (in the 19th century) and Father John of Kronstadt (about 1900) have been published and translated into German, English, French and other languages.

Today sermons are preached in all the churches, beginning with the liturgically-minded Russian Orthodox Church. (This is remarked by the atheist press.)

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The October revolution brought the separation of the Church from the state, and the separation of the Church from the schools. Consequently religious instruction in schools ceased altogether. The new socialist schools took in hand the moral training of youth in accordance with atheist principles.

The theological seminaries and academies also had to close their doors after the revolution. They were re-opened towards the end of the second world war.

The Constitution of the USSR grants freedom of religious worship and of anti-religious propaganda to all Soviet citizens. Hence preaching, as a form of spiritual training within the Church for people of all ages is even more important than before, not only in the Orthodox churches but also in all the other churches.

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The sermon is based on instruction in the Christian faith, and it explains especially in the Orthodox churches the deeper significance of the sacraments. It tries to help the congregation to arrive at a more profound understanding of the Christian heritage by explaining the meaning of baptism, confession, the Eucharist and the sacrament of matrimony.

The purpose of all the sermons is to explain the meaning of the Christian faith. In the Protestant congregations the preaching is concentrated on a systematic study of the Bible.

The sermons preached at funerals strike a special note. In the large cities (i.e. in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev) over 50% of the people have church funerals. Similarly the figures given by all the different Christian confessions show that 80% to 90% of all children born in the USSR are baptised.

There are no general figures available with regard to the situation in the country districts.

The fact that baptisms and funerals are attended both by Christians and by non-Christians shows that the Christian message carries influence in the USSR.

The calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church also gives Bible quotations for daily use, which are referred to in the sermons, and the Orthodox Church has recently reprinted the Bible. So the Bible is read not only by the clergy but also by many lay men and women.

During the course of the church-year the four Gospels and the New Testament Epistles are read in this way by the church-members. The laity who read the church calendar are kept in regular contact in this way with the pericopes of the Church.

Also the liturgical prayers are organically connected with a deeper knowledge of the Bible.

Not only on Sundays but also on week-days, the liturgical services of the Russian Orthodox Church usually close with a few words of spiritual reflection. And the sermons do not confine themselves to mere admonitions to carry out the commandments of the Bible. They address themselves to the conscience of both Christians and non-Christians who are attracted by the problem of man's relation with the unknown, with God.

In loyalty to the legal limitations imposed upon it, to confine Christian instruction strictly within the walls of the Church, the inalienable tenets of the Christian faith are offered to young and old in the worship-service.

The sermon and religious instruction are fused in one in the Soviet Union, where all other forms of religious instruction are officially prohibited (except privately).

Preaching in the light of the Orthodox Church

What the Russian Orthodox Church thinks about its own preaching is shown from a bibliography in the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate (No. 12, 1958). It is a review of the fourth volume of sermons of Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsi and Kolomna, including all the sermons he preached between 1954 and 1957.

"Foreign comments on the previous volumes of these sermons expressed the view that his reachings did not reflect present-day realities. But this shows the quality of these teachings, their ontological character. These sermons purify the soul and reveal the eternal truth of the Christian faith... The Metropolitan does not speak about politics, but about spiritual truth, i.g. the moral behaviour of Christians, pointing out the way of redemption through the circumstances of earthly life."

Metropolitan Nikolai "preaches about eternal life, about the Kingdom of God, about God's love and His truth, about sin which estranges man from God, and about the merciful restoration of fellowship with God through the sacrament of atonement."

He speaks "of earthly life as a time in which love is to take form in man's soul, as the seed of eternal life... He speaks of the death of the body, of the eternal soul and its resurrection from the dead... He speaks of the treasures of the Christian tradition, and shows that the highest aim of the Christian life is Christ... He also speaks of the blessing of the Eucharist, and of the meaning of suffering in earthly life; of divine providence in the life of the individual Christian, of the communion of Saints and the fellowship between Christians in this life and the next; of the Mother of God as our advocate before God and the source of joy; of faith, hope and love as the most precious qualities of the Christian soul; of inner illumination concerning the end of our earthly life; of the sacrifice made by Christ to save us from sin, eternal damnation and eternal death; of the resurrection of Christ... of the eternal Easter to come, of love, of peace, of universal brotherhood, and of the necessity for action... Eternity and man... the earthly and the eternal in their relationship... these are the themes of Metropolitan Nikolai's sermons."

On whatever subject Metropolitan Nikolai speaks, "the truth of the Christian faith is not formal or abstract; it stirs the souls, the thoughts and the feelings of his audience, and forces them to carry out this truth in practice in their own lives."

His sermons "are admonitions, appeals, pointing to the true aim of life. His theology is ethical in character. When speaking of Holy Communion he urges people to come to the Lord's Table in a truly spiritual frame of mind, as if they were participating in the Last Supper on the Day of Judgment."

In the Sacrament of Atonement the attitude of the person making confession "must be the same as if he were making his final confession before he dies." When Metropolitan Nikolai speaks of

God's merciful providence, he tells his listeners "to be grateful to God for everything." And when he speaks of faith as a gift of God, he leads them to "an attitude of love towards earthly life and action - for the Christian faith has no contempt for human life and its efforts." In times of suffering the Metropolitan teaches that "we must not despair; we must believe in the merciful workings of divine providence; we must believe also that even if God does not diminish our trials (in spite of our prayers) He will nevertheless console us in His grace and reconcile us with His holy will." The fact "that Christ has redeemed us from sin, from the Last Judgment and from eternal damnation must not lead us to conclude that we need do nothing further about our salvation. No, in order to train our souls for eternity we must accept the fact of our redemption through Christ and make it our permanent inheritance."

It is the same on every subject. The Metropolitan portrays the eternal truth of the Christian faith in its moral application, and in its absolute claim on the spiritual life of Christians. For "his basic concern is the salvation of man for eternity through the inner transformation of the soul." Hence he calls his listeners "to be redeemed, admonishing them like a father to open their hearts to the eternal light of God's commandment of love as the basic law of human life and of purity of soul and mind." There is therefore "no justification in the criticism that the Metropolitan's sermons divert the Christian from playing an active part in the life of this world." The Metropolitan "brings earthly life into the right relationship with eternity;" He "does not urge people to turn aside from earthly life in the search for eternal life. On the contrary, he teaches people to love this earthly life as a greatly underrated gift of God, and as the first stage in the undeviating life of the human personality, a period in which, within the framework of life on earth people acquire those qualities which after death will develop and be perfected in the life beyond. Especially after the resurrection of the body and the reunion of body and soul. According to this view earthly life is shown to be of the highest importance, a most noble thing." We must not forget that "Christianity does not teach the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the body, because the body will be transfigured and then reunited with the soul. In other words, Christianity speaks of the immortality of man as a whole. It does not take him away from this world; but after his resurrection from the dead it promises him a new earth and a new heaven wherein truth dwells."...

With regard to homiletics, the Metropolitan's sermons are examples of the spoken Word, "which is the highest form of evangelism." "His language is clear, expressive and beautiful, full of imagery, examples and comparisons. They show how powerful the preaching of a spiritual shepherd can be if he continues the evangelism of Our Lord Jesus Christ in revealing to Christians the eternal, redeeming truth of God's revelation."

Another section of the book, which is devoted to "The defence of Peace", contains messages, addresses, explanations, reports, articles and speeches, and descriptions of the Metropolitan's

travels all over the world in the service of peace and friendship. "He appears here on the public stage as a representative of the Church. This section clearly shows the Christian basis of our Russian Orthodox Church for the defence of peace. The defence of peace lies at the very heart of the Church... The concern for peace is not dictated by political interests, but is rooted in the effort to save the souls of men. It is the fulfilment of the real duty of Christians, which is to fulfil the commandment of the divine founder of human brotherhood to love others and to live peaceably with all men."

Concerning the questions of dogmatics the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate writes: "Every individual must discover the Dogmas for himself, which are (by their very nature) unchanging. The task of Orthodox theological preaching is to explain these dogmas and to instil them into the minds of Christians..."

All sections of the book are rounded off in the last part of the (fourth) volume.

This makes the collection of sermons into "an excellent handbook for pastors in their preaching ministry." And the Metropolitan's public work, "which emphasises the Church's task in the public life of our people, will help our clergy and all Christians to carry out their duties as citizens to the motherland and the nation."

From a sermon on a Christian prayer
("Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No.11, 1958)

Through prayer "man's spiritual life grows to maturity..." Through prayer "God in His grace bestows strength on man to overcome his trials and difficulties..." What "at first sight seems difficult becomes easy through prayer..."

Our Lord Jesus Christ was himself in constant communion with the Father through prayer, and he also taught us how to pray: "Our Father... "

The holy Apostles also realised the importance of prayer...

"When the first social workers were chosen, whose special responsibility should be to look after the poor, they were told, 'we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word' (Acts.6: 4). The Apostles 'left behind them a tradition of constant prayer ...' This is confirmed by the Early Fathers in their preaching and by their example. They describe prayer as 'the sacred mother of all virtues' and as the culmination of 'all good action'.

To the Christian "prayer is as indispensable as the foundation is to a house". This profound longing "springs from our soul which is striving without ceasing for the source of life, which is God." And this search finds its ultimate expression "in the dialogue with

God, which is prayer ..." Anyone "who is able to pray is already redeemed." The Orthodox Church teaches that "prayer means lifting the heart and the mind to God. It is man's attempt to approach God in reverence ..."

But over and above the meaning of prayer in the narrower sense, contained in the Bible, and in accordance with the teaching of the Early Fathers, prayer means something more: "it is man's religious-ethical, psychic attitude as he turns unceasingly in all sincerity to God; it is the expression of confidence in God in every situation."

"Prayer is a means of healing", said Saint John Chrysostom, "but we have to know how to apply it, otherwise it will not do us any good." Preparation is essential for the right fulfilment of prayer. A piece of wood will not burn unless it has been dried beforehand; and a piece of iron cannot be forged unless it has been heated first. How much more essential it is to prepare oneself for prayer. "If thou wilt serve God, do so in all seriousness, so that thou dost not tempt Him" (Sirach 18, 23)...

The first (virtue) which guides us to prayer "is faith in the universal presence of the living God."

Our Saviour therefore enjoins us to pray in a spirit of unswerving faith: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11, 24). Jesus asks the blind men, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9, 28), and they answered, "Yes, Lord".

Through faith the human spirit can rise from earth to heaven. "Faith gives wings to prayer", said St. John, for "without faith prayer cannot rise up to God."

"Prayer that is based on strong faith", wrote Saint Tychon, "attains all things, for the Lord has mercy on those who pray to Him in true faith ..." We must remember at all times that God is ever-present."

Faith and love go hand in hand with the Christian hope, which is the decisive factor in making prayer effective. "Without hope Christian prayer has no life and no spirit..."

The holy Fathers teach us "why God insists that prayer should be patient and persistent, why He does not immediately grant people the things for which they pray, but hesitates to bestow His gifts of grace..." Saint Augustine says, "What is given gradually is more deeply assimilated"; for "one quickly forgets what one is praying for ..."

Saint Basil teaches that "God hesitates to grant our prayers, lest we should cease to stand in His presence."

A sermon on repentance
("Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No.10, 1958)

"Of all other sinners we must think most often of the penitent thief who was crucified and died at Christ's side." It was "not by chance that he died on the cross beside our Lord and Saviour; it was the will of God." It pleased God that, "every time we think of the Cross of Christ, we should also think of the man who hung at his right side, and who repented in the hour of his death, so that the gates of God's Kingdom opened to him..."

But "the sinners who remember the thief on the cross must not postpone their own repentance until they are on their deathbeds, in the hope that they can atone for their past lives before the Lord like the thief..."

Real repentance means a change of heart, like that which took place in the heart of the thief. We know what he could not know; we know much more. We perceive the power of God, as it has been revealed in His holy Church for nearly 2,000 years. We see His guiding hand in the life of every one of us, preserving us from all evil, healing our diseases, comforting and strengthening us... We must have a faith that is unshaken by doubt. It must be so strong that nothing and no one can destroy it, so that through it we may approach our Saviour with repentant hearts... Let people laugh at us if they like for our faith in Jesus Christ; do thou remain loyal to him, unswerving in faith. Lay thy faith at his feet whenever thou openest thy heart to him in repentance. Then he shall answer thee, with the healing words, "My son, thy sins are forgiven thee..."

We know much more than the thief on the cross knew. We know that we are guilty; we realise what sins we have committed in the eyes of God.

We know that we have besmirched the sanctity and majesty of God, and how disobedient and self-willed we are as children of our heavenly Father...

We know that. "But do we curse our sins, do we hate them, do we turn aside from them?... Are we filled with horror when we realise how far away we have strayed from God? Are we prepared to confess our sins not merely to the priest but (if God so wills) to all men, to everyone in the world, for the sake of the faith which is our sole hope of forgiveness?..."

True repentance "must always be accompanied by practical fruits. We receive the joyful certainty of forgiveness... and we cannot keep our joy to ourselves. We have to express it. We want to embrace everybody, to love them, to do something for them, so that some of our sins may be remitted and wiped out in the book of life..."

As long "as we are still alive as long as the Church holds open its doors to welcome us with spiritual food, we must repent before God. We must repent as if this were our last confession before we die... for God alone knows when our life on earth will end."

What is the sin against the Holy Spirit?

(Extracts from a sermon published in the quarterly magazine of the Union of Baptists and Evangelical Christians in the USSR.)

This sermon explains that the sin against the Holy Spirit can only be committed by an apostate Christian or by a man who has believed in the possibility of the Holy Spirit influencing his life.

The non-believer is not capable of sinning against the Holy Spirit even if he actively opposes the Christian faith, and he can therefore not be held responsible in this respect. This is the conclusion drawn from the following text.

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According to Matth. 12: 31-32, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come". "There are grave sins (murder, theft, etc.) which can be forgiven because the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"(I. John 1:7). Sin against the Holy Spirit, however, cannot be forgiven, for it is beyond mercy and forgiveness.

How is the sin against the Holy Spirit committed? There is no clear answer to this question. Often sincere Christians ask themselves whether they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. People in despair say that they have become guilty of this sin and that they have thus forfeited all hope of forgiveness of their sins.

One man in the USSR, who fell into such despair, even "gave up his work in God's vineyard and died a painful death just because he thought that he had sinned against the Holy Spirit."

The sin against the Holy Spirit is committed only where a particular pronouncement is made.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles, who spoke different languages. The second chapter of the Acts speaks about this and tells us that some people had said "the apostles are full of new wine." Did the men, who said this, sin against the Holy Spirit? No, for it is said later on in the Acts that these men repented afterwards and became Christians - 3,000 of them.

Thus every word is not a sin against the Holy Spirit.

But why then did Jesus Christ make this severe statement? Because already during his time on earth there were people (the pharisees) who maintained that Christ cast out devils by Beelzebub. Such statements, however, cannot be forgiven.

How is this to be understood with regard to ourselves?

Christ always judged men on the basis of their spiritual condition. In Hebrews 6: 4-6 it is said: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

The pharisees were men who were waiting for Christ, but who never had any close relationship with Him and who did not become partakers of the Holy Spirit. They did not know the Holy Spirit. Thus they forfeited the forgiveness of their sins.

A man who has never felt the Holy Spirit cannot blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The individual Christian can become guilty of blasphemy. But if this happens unconsciously or unmindfully, it is no sin against the Holy Spirit. But if this blasphemous word is spoken by a man, who wants to crucify Jesus Christ once more, he becomes guilty of blasphemy and cannot be granted forgiveness, because he is no longer capable of receiving forgiveness...

What conclusion can we draw from this?

That we should not approach the Holy Spirit thoughtlessly... As long as we remain faithful we cannot blaspheme the Holy Spirit, but we can become guilty of a thoughtless approach to the Holy Spirit. "We cannot tolerate such things in our congregations."

In Old Testament times the name of the Most Holy (Jahve) was so highly revered that the people of Israel did not even pronounce the name of God, but replaced it by the name of Adonai (Lord).

Therefore, if you call upon the Holy Spirit, do so with fear and trembling. But if it should happen that you approach the Holy Spirit thoughtlessly without, however, wanting to abandon him, this is not a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and you will be forgiven.

Sometimes the Christian no longer feels the grace which is worked in him by the Holy Spirit. This too is not yet a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit...

Is it possible for a faithful Christian to act against the Holy Spirit and to hurt him? He can do so by smaller or unimportant offences, such as in his relations with fellow-Christians or in the life of the parish (e.g. if a man instead of speaking quietly and softly uses strong words in a parish meeting and pretends to do this for the good of the parish). A Christian whose heart is fully conscious of God's presence and who is full of love, cannot raise his voice against anybody...

Let us keep anything from the Holy Spirit which must necessarily hurt him, just as we do not put rubbish on the table to our guests. The Holy Spirit is like a fire which must not be extinguished.

When is the flame of the Holy Spirit extinguished? When the process of burning is disturbed or when there is too much wind...

"What kind of fuel is necessary to keep the flame from going out? The close contact between God's Spirit and man's spirit. This contact produces the warmth which fills the soul of men. A man who is longing for the Holy Spirit must direct his whole being towards the living God. Where this longing is missing we do not have enough carbon, although there is plenty of divine oxygen. Therefore the fire cannot go on burning..."

The devotional life suffers from this lack of spiritual fuel. We pray too quickly, or we pray only when others pray. We no longer seek quietness, we do not devote one free moment to communion with God, we pray "by chance"... Our prayer takes on a purely formal character. If the soul does not long for God the result is separation from God and a separation of the divine carbon from the oxygen. As there is no fuel the fire goes out ...

When you realize that your spiritual joy is diminishing, take this as a clear sign that something is wrong within you: the fire is going out...

But, what is even more important: the love within you cools down, - the love which urges us to embrace everybody, both the good and the evil. This means that the believer is dying spiritually... until one day only a sad memory remains of the whole of Christianity, whose path is illumined by the flame of the Holy Spirit.

Easter night at the theological seminary of Kiev
From the diary of a student

"With the first stroke of the bell on Maunday Thursday the deep sorrow about the divine suffering of Christ began to fade from my heart. Soon, very soon we shall hear the joyful cry: Christ is risen!... Soon, very soon the black vestment of the priest will be changed for the silvery Easter gown... Evensong on the Saturday of Passion Week is the prelude to the hallelujah of the resurrection."

On my way to the seminary my heart is full of the joy of Easter, - a joy, which is not yet known by all men, but which enlightens all men with its light and which is so near, so near to everybody...

The door of the big church is wide open, it will not be closed all day, nor during the night...

"I hasten to the little hill where our director, Father Constantine, speaks about the Easter service and explains the meaning of what happened during the Easter night. He tells us how Easter is celebrated in Jerusalem at the tomb of our Lord..., about Easter in Abyssinia, and about the Easter Liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church. We can feel how spring is awakening around us..."

The bells of the Florovsky monastery are announcing the Easter message. "We cross ourselves reverently and impatiently count the minutes ... Far away across the woods, the rivers and the lakes echoes the sound of the bells bringing the joyful message..."

"The dark church is now full of people... The young voices who are reading the Easter story rise up into the dome of the church. There is an anticipated joy of Easter... The midnight service has started... After the benediction the Easter Liturgy is celebrated..."

Meditation:

"Faith is a power bestowed by God. This power has renewed the world which was perishing in sin, and this power of God continues to work in the whole world, as well as in the hearts of the faithful. It builds up the kingdom of God by leading mankind to truth and holiness, by making every man love his neighbours, and by bringing peace to the whole world... Let us pray to the risen Lord through the mouth of the Holy Church that we may taste the truth of heaven..."

The Liturgy continues, attended by a great many people with happy faces....

"Now the Gospel is being read by the deacon in the Slav ecclesiastical language, followed by the same reading in the twelve different languages spoken in this area of the USSR... How clearly this reading in twelve different languages brings home to us that the Apostles' message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is addressed to every people on earth!"

The Russian Orthodox Church's struggle for peace

The Press Section attached to the Russian Embassy in Berne publishes the following article (in its 9th number dated 4th March, 1959) entitled "The Russian Orthodox Church's struggle for peace". The article is written by Archimandrite Leonid, Professor at the Religious Academy, Moscow.

"The Orthodox Church has inherited from its Creator the spiritual salvation which aspires to announce and discover to men the divine value of peace. ("Peace be with you"). The Orthodox Church's participation in the peace movement lies at its very heart. It tries to carry out the teaching of the Apostles, as contained in their Epistles, to "seek peace and ensue it" (I. Peter 3, 11); "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (II. Tim. 2; 22); "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3, 18). The Russian Orthodox Church has therefore been in the vanguard of this great and noble movement for peace ever since it was born.

In 1949, when the World Peace Committee proposed to call the World Peace Congress, His Holiness Patriarch Alexis wrote: "The Orthodox Church of Christ, which preaches peace and charity, calls all those to whom peace is dear to support the effort to unite in the common defence of peace." And he appealed to all the autocephalous Orthodox sister-churches "to raise their voices against all forms of aggression and any actions which aim at infringing peace."

In March 1950 His Holiness, Patriarch Alexis, sent a second message to the autocephalous sister-churches saying: "It is time for all of us, pastors of Christ's flock, to declare openly and publicly that international problems can never again be settled at the cost of millions of lives. We must recognise the right of every individual, and of every nation, to live as they wish. The struggle for this right is the struggle for international peace, and for the eradication of international crime; this struggle is the responsibility of us all, as pastors."

That is why the Russian Orthodox Church never ceases appealing for peace. This is why it sends its representative, Nicholas, Metropolitan of Krutitsy and Kolomna (as a worthy assistant to His Holiness, Patriarch Alexis) to all the peace conferences. The Metropolitan states: "We affirm our participation in the struggle for peace as a Christian mission. We firmly believe that this Christian participation in the struggle for peace is the germ of a better future, and that it is our duty as Christians to take part in this high action in Christ's name."

Metropolitan Nicholas denounces war as an evil which comes from the depths of hell - an evil which is opposed not only by religion, but by the conscience of all human beings who are not obscured by egoism, the thirst for power, and cupidity.

At every session of the World Peace Council the nations have heard its moving appeals to unite against the rearmament programme, and to draw millions of other people into the struggle for peace.

A conference of representatives of all the Churches and religious associations in the USSR, dedicated to the preservation of peace, was convened in May 1952 in the Cathedral of the Trinity and Saint-Sergius at the monastery of Zagorsk near Moscow on the initiative of Patriarch Alexis. The conference appealed to the believers of all the religions in the world to "build a moral barrier against the passions which lead to aggression against peaceful neighbours, and to denounce it as a crime against morals and humanity". He expressed his conviction that "the clouds which cover the sky today will then not fall upon the earth in the form of burning tar, in a hail of atomic bombs nor in miriads of disease-microbes, but in the form of refreshing dew which will nourish the seeds of peace which we have sown in men's hearts."

The Orthodox Church of Russia has supported every peace-effort ever made, not only in the Soviet Union but all over the world.

His Holiness, Patriarch Alexis, in all his messages has appealed to the clergy and to Christians to be pioneers for peace.

All the members of the Russian Orthodox Church are enthusiastic supporters of the idea of peace; none of the Christians under its guidance would approve of war. Russian Christians believe that if the whole of Christendom were penetrated with Christ's commandment, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6, 33) and consistently pursued the way to God's Kingdom, the unity of Christendom would be assured. That is why the members of the Russian Orthodox Church joyfully welcomed the news that the leading theologians in the German Federal Republic and in the German Democratic Republic were among the first to support the appeal made by the eighteen German nuclear scientists, urging the whole world to stop the atomic tests and to stop manufacturing nuclear armaments. By supporting this appeal the Bishops of the German Protestant Church strengthened still more the ties of friendship between their Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, first forged in 1952. That is why Metropolitan Nicholas' instructions concerning the best way to carry out our aspirations are extremely valuable: "... we must maintain mutual relations", he said last year at the Stockholm Congress. "A high aim is necessary to establish mutual understanding, and to overcome disagreements".

It is to this high aim that the Russian Orthodox Church calls its members. That is its attitude towards the most burning questions of our time.

This spirituality, this aspiration to unity in Christ, is a guarantee of the eternal future of man's aspirations toward progress.

The Russian Orthodox Church preaches the God of love, the Father of all men, and thus lays the foundation-stone of true human brotherhood. It raises men and teaches them to respect one another's moral qualities, so that all may contribute to the culture of the world.

The spirit of Christianity, as expressed by the the Russian Orthodox Church, is an important factor in the ever-growing movement among Russian Christians to establish peace all over the world.

Restoration of Orthodox Churches

In October 1958 the Church of St. Nicholas in the town of Voronesch was consecrated by Archbishop Joseph of Voronesch and Lipetzk. This ancient building had fallen into decay, but has now been restored.

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In Zlatoust, a town in the diocese of Tcheliabinsk (Siberia), the restored Church of St. Simeon of Verchotursk has received a visit from its Bishop, John of Tcheliabinsk and Zlatoust, who consecrated the interior wall-decorations:

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Bishop John of Tallin and Esthonia, who was in charge of the Latvian Orthodox diocese, has visited the Orthodox congregation of Old Believers in Riga. This congregation belongs to the priestless branch (Bespopowzy) of the Old Believers. Their church-building has recently been renovated and contains many rare and valuable icons.

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One of the oldest churches in Russia is the restored Cathedral of the Ascension of Mary in Vladimir. It has 800 years of history behind it and, like some of the smaller churches in the district including the beautiful Pokrov-na-Nerli church (under the protection of the Virgin) is one of the famous historical Orthodox churches in this part of the country.

A report in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" gives the following account of it: "Eight hundred years is a long time. What experiences the walls of this sanctuary have seen! The town has been reduced to dust and ashes by great fires, which are unknown anywhere except in the Russian steppes. One attack succeeded another... After Kiev, Vladimir also fell under the yoke of the Tartars. But the white walls of the cathedral with its high cupolas stood fast like a knight's helmet. And behind Vladimir rose the firm land of Moscow."

The "fame of the shining town of Vladimir on the hill, with its ancient cathedral church, will never fade in the history of Russia"... The "Uspensky Cathedral" has remained unscathed as a symbol of the sufferings of the people ... Beneath its lofty dome "the miraculous icon of the Mother of God shines with a silent and gracious radiance." Surely the vicissitudes through which this church has itself survived are among the greatest miracles wrought beneath this icon?..."

Later on this icon as a national sanctuary was transferred to Moscow, where one of the great main thoroughfares still bears a name commemorating the Mary's Purification.

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In the autumn of 1958 Archbishop Benjamin of Irkutsk (Siberia) for the first time visited the congregations in the Far East. He visited the renovated churches of Chabarovsk, Ussurijsk and Vladivostock, and in all these places liturgical services were held, with sermons.

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The Uspensky cathedral at Tashkent (Uzbekistan) has been completely restored. Its consecration was attended by crowds of people from the parishes in the district. The "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" writes: "The beauty and nobility of the new cathedral church surpassed all expectations. The hearts of the believers were filled with joy and gratitude to God for His mercy, and the bells were rung everywhere, also in the diocese of Tashkent and Middle Asia. The throng was so tremendous that the officiating clergy had to perform the ceremony inside the chancel, owing to lack of space. They could not all take part, except in the procession round the church."

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The monastery of Petseri on the Esthonian frontier, which is 500 years old, has been restored once more. The commemoration services were attended by a large number of believers. The scene presented by these pilgrims is described as follows in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate":

"The day before the ceremony the lawn in front of the cathedral of St. Michael was covered with masses of fresh flowers. The pilgrims were camping under the trees and making garlands to decorate the cathedral. They did not do so to pass the time, nor merely for traditional reasons, but in honour of the Mother of God, so that everything should look cheerful and festive. They were all wearing their best clothes; many of the Estonian women were in their national costume. The whole scene was dominated by an atmosphere of quiet, recollected joy."

USSR

Card-Index of old Russian Churches

The Institute of the Building Academy in the Soviet Union has an up-to-date card-index of the old church buildings in Russia. The card-index is lodged in the Donskoi Monastery in Moscow.

It contains information about all the church-buildings in the USSR, including the wooden churches in the extreme north. Every card bears a photograph of the church in question, together with the date when it was built and its measurements.

This card-index represents years of conscientious work, coordinated with long journeys made by the members of the Institute who visited the churches on the spot and took photographs and exact measurements.

USSR

Only two Lutheran Churches in the Soviet Union

There are only two state-recognised and officially-registered Evangelical Lutheran churches left in the Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltic countries: the church of Akmolinsk (under the care of Pastor Eugen Bachmann) and the church of Karaganda (under the care of Pastor Friedrich Schafer and Mr. Schwarzkopf). They cover wide districts around Akmolinsk and Karaganda, where there are a great many German people. Other Evangelical churches which are not registered are scattered over Siberia, Central Asia, the Ural district and Northern Russia. They are under the care of laymen. They have not yet been registered. Before registration can be effected, lists of all the church-members have to be drawn up and submitted to the Soviet authorities.

USSR

Atheist propaganda

Although we cannot speak of a "religious war" in the USSR, the struggle between faith and atheism seems to become more intense, as far as theories are concerned.

As may be seen from the following text, atheist propaganda considers the religious activities of the faithful as a challenge which must be resisted energetically. The following extract is taken from an article by the Academy of Science and Culture entitled "Another attempt to reconcile faith and knowledge", published in the philosophical magazine "Voprosy Filosofii" (Philosophical Questions) No.1, 1959, p.181.

* * *

The religions of today, "Christendom, Islam, Buddhism, and other historically founded dogmas and principles can be traced back to two different sources"...

"On the one hand there is the concept of God as such; and on the other hand there are the ethical principles and dogmas, i.e. cultural, legal, and scientific conceptions, which are artificially linked up with the concept of God, with the doctrine of one God... In former periods of history religion was the only means of expressing these ideals and primitive conceptions about the creation of the world and the progress of mankind, these particular concepts having mainly been formed by individual peoples or related ethnic groups..."

This "duality in the cognitive foundation of religion" is "the source of one of its fundamental contradictions." On the one hand there are "the real, historically developed ideals and perceptions of the people", on the other hand we find "an abstract concept of God..." "The efforts of religion to acquire the authenticity of scientific knowledge (which is gaining more and more ground in human society as a whole, not only among scholars) must therefore be related to the origin of religion as such."

But now there has been a change in the original forms, which shows very clearly the development of the religious point of view.

From the very beginning "religion has systematically tried to reconcile and to combine the concept of God with the fundamental discoveries of science, as far as they were consciously assimilated by society..."

It is against this background that "we have to judge all the efforts of modern "fideism" to reconcile faith and science." Religion has always been "ready to jettison scientific knowledge in order to sell its own ideas."

But without such a realistic content (which is however against the nature of religion) "religious faith would be deprived of its fundamental cognitive basis."

Apart from the "social sources of religion", it is "its duality which explains why religion has a certain vital power, and why today 'fideism' is trying to maintain this duality at all costs."

It is precisely this duality which "explains the reactionary force in 'fideism' up to modern times, i.e. its relationship with science, ethics, etc...."

"Religion offers the people ethical and other conceptions and principles, which have developed in the course of history and which are steadily progressing, and presents them as the fruits of divine revelation..."

"As religion regards God as the incarnation of the highest perfection, these principles and conceptions are made into dogmas and absolute values, which are jealously guarded by the church..."

"Modern 'fideism' continues the old religious traditions. It wants to adapt the concept of God to modern science, because an abstract concept as such is not conducive to further progress. That is why religion needs science..."

Present-day fideism is striving to reconcile faith and science under the modern conditions of life, which seem to promote such a development.

Today "a general revolution is taking place in science. Former scientific discoveries prove to be inadequate and make room for new conceptions." In the scientific field enormous achievements are being made. "New fields of knowledge are being explored for the first time, but many other fields still await scientific investigation." Modern science is not yet able to explain certain phenomena which do not seem to obey any fixed scientific laws..."

These "unexplained phenomena can nevertheless be explained philosophically, if they are understood dialectically." The development of new fundamental and scientific concepts and of a new "Weltbild" necessitates "discovering new dialectical conformities."

These new scientific laws might help "to explain what so far (according to religion) seems unexplicable..."

"Dialectical materialism stresses the unlimited possibilities of discovering new laws concerning objective reality... For the dialectical character of these scientific laws as an expression of reality is beyond all doubt. It is superior to religion."

USSR

Secular Press in Soviet Russia makes use of religious expressions

Expressions like "God forbid!", "Thank God!" and "for heaven's sake!" constantly occur in the secular press in the USSR, as the following example shows. It is an account of elections in Kiev published in the "Literaturnaya Gazeta" of March 3rd, 1959 (No. 27).

"How did you vote?" I asked a man of about 45. He smiled, and countered "do you mean for whom, or for what?" "I mean, for what?" I repeated.

"How can I explain... Of course, I voted for still better living conditions. But as for choosing a candidate... I don't come from here, I was drafted here from Tshernigov. I went to Election Office No. 27, was given a ballot-paper and asked "Whom shall I vote for?" I was told, "The candidate who is to represent us on the Supreme Soviet is the cook at the restaurant at 200, Karl-Marx Street".

"Thank God for that", I said, "for if it had been the cook at the restaurant in Saksaganski Street I should have hesitated about voting for him, on my honour."

USSR Writer Jan Niedre, Reply to an anonymous letter from Riga (Latvia)

"Literaturnaiia Gazeta", 12.2.1959:

"I have received an extraordinary letter. The writer urges me to give up publishing "secular" books, and to turn to "the Source of Truth", i.e. to God and His Son, Jesus Christ. This, he maintains, is the only justification for man's life.

I would probably not have answered this letter, if I had regarded it as the work of a single eccentric. But this nonsense is symptomatic of a very serious situation. I therefore decided to answer the anonymous writer, and those who think as he does.

Your face, Mr. Anonymous, is very familiar to me. You are not one of those believers whose belief in religious superstition is due to tradition or to lack of education. No, you are one of the militant advocates of obscurantism who throughout history have been opposed by all progressive thinkers. You are one of those people who, under the cassock of a Roman Catholic priest, the robes of an Orthodox priest, or the sober garb of a Baptist preacher conceal your obscure activities and your hatred of progress...

You are one of those men who creep about, who always put on a kind smile when they are among people, and whose honeyed voices give the impression of sheer goodwill and love of mankind. Nevertheless it is of ecclesiastics like you that simple people complain to the Soviet authorities. It is your intrigues which arouse their indignation.

What exactly do these people write? They say that "holy" Father Smilga, in the Kirov district of Riga, has secretly opened a brothel where the clients are served by girls procured by Smilga for this purpose. . . . They say that 30 nuns in the Aglon convent have contracted tuberculosis, and that the Church will not allow them to receive any medical treatment. Doctors are refused admission

Roman

to the convent. This/Catholic sanctuary has become a breeding-place for tuberculosis. They write that the Roman Catholic priest at Dagda is known as a disturber of public order, and that he was recently condemned to a fortnight's imprisonment...

When I mentioned your letter to some of my friends, we discovered that some of them had received similar anonymous letters. It became evident that members of various religious denominations and sects have been carrying on widespread agitation during the last few years, in order to win the sympathies of the people, especially youth. Their propaganda consists in 'curing illness through prayer', averting 'surprise attack by atom-bombs by faith in the Almighty', etc.

By means of obnoxious anonymous letters you may perhaps succeed in winning over weak, unprincipled people. For instance a short time ago in Riga a young married woman of good education sought consolation from religious preachers after receiving a strong emotional shock. And six months ago I was amazed to be told by the headmaster of a secondary school that just before their final examinations some of his pupils had expressed the desire 'to enter a Catholic monastery'.

What is the explanation? Is our anti-religious propaganda less effective than their unscientific form of preaching? No; there is another factor involved. We fall short of them in some way. That, I think, is the explanation of our mistake, which I shall attempt to explain fully.

Your agitators are stubborn and persistent in recruiting "brethren and sisters". They write letters. They send out religious tracts and pamphlets. They pursue people who are lonely and in need of friendly support and consolation. We offer nothing to equal their persistency.

We approach religious propagandists and agitators, and preachers of all kinds of sects, not as representatives of an entirely strange mentality, but with the diplomacy and goodwill which we extend to foreigners.

People's religious feelings must not be hurt. But on the other hand, we must not neglect atheist propaganda. Sometimes we allow our ideological opponents too much freedom, thereby neglecting militant atheism.

In Latvia members of the different religious bodies celebrate their religious festivals without let or hindrance, even during harvest time.

In Catholic Lettgallen tens of thousands of believers make pilgrimages on the Feast of the Assumption and on Saint Donatus' Day to Aglon and Kraslev. These pilgrimages take the people away from their work in the Kolchoses just at harvest time. And they don't mind using state transport for their religious manifestations. Some of the directors of Kolchoses are even so kind as to place cars and other means of transport at their disposal, so as "to avoid

hurting the religious feelings of believers". Whereas the members of sports clubs and artistic circles have to trudge for miles along muddy roads to their training-courses and rehearsals.

Why should we help people who write anonymous letters, and who go from door to door trying to draw human souls into their web with their lies? It is our duty as Soviet writers to consider how to combat these men of darkness in their ignorance, their stupidity, and their bad influence.

The anonymous letter compels me to express what I think and to tell the public plainly what I propose to do in the inevitable struggle between the new and the old, between progress and reaction, between light and darkness.

My eye is caught by the following passage in your letter, "It is not in man's power to change the general course of events."

No, you will not succeed in converting us to sitting with folded hands and putting our trust in God. We intend to struggle for the world and for the strengthening of communism. Our people today are not looking for some imaginary kingdom of God; they are working for the future of communism.

One of the main tasks in strengthening Communism is that of re-educating people's ethical and mental outlook. We must learn to make our atheist propaganda more convincing and to give people a new conception of the world based on scientific materialism. Religion is steadily losing ground. The arsenal of atheist propaganda is being strengthened by great achievements such as the Russian sputnik - the new planet created by the brains and hands of Soviet citizens.

From your letter and from other factors it is clear that you have not yet given up the gauntlet. We shall therefore have to continue the struggle to save people's souls from your disintegrating influence."

USSR

Atheist publications planned for 1959

The new atheist publications for the year are usually announced at the beginning of January. Twenty publications of this kind, mainly pamphlets for mass-consumption, are planned for 1959. The publishers are anxious to make these cheap publications as interesting as possible, so that they will be read "even by religious believers".

* * *

1. The first series planned is to be on "Religious Customs and Festivals". Without hurting the feelings of believers, these booklets "will describe the origin of the different systems of belief, in a way that is comprehensible to everyone, "quoting direct from the 'Sacred Books' of the various religions and showing how they oppose the views of science and the general way of life." These pamphlets are richly illustrated. It is also planned to publish a series of pamphlets on the "Religious Sects" for mass-consumption.

Several pamphlets are intended for students and for readers who are interested in the problem of religion and atheism.

2. The statements of the Communist Party and of the Soviet Government about religion and the task of scientific atheist propaganda are contained in a large hand-book. The publisher's announcement says that "this book will be extremely useful to propagandists for atheism."

3. One important new book is another hand-book entitled "The Atheist's Companion"; it contains contributions from specialists, philosophers, religious historians and atheist historians. It deals with questions such as the class-nature of religion, and the different religious trends. "Can one believe the sacred books?", "Miracles which have nothing miraculous about them", "Science and Religion", "Church and State", "Religious and Communist Morality", "Forms and Methods of Atheist Propaganda", "A short dictionary of atheist terms" are the titles of some of the chapters.

4. Another book contains some of the writings of the 18th century Enlightenment in France. There is also a new edition of the writings of P. Hollbach. Two other books "will rouse the interest of readers": a summary of the many statements made by A.W. Lunatscharsky in the 1920's when he was working as first National Commissar for Cultural Affairs; these speeches and lectures are selected in such a way as to represent religion as the enemy of science. "The incompatibility of religious faith with the ideals of Communism is shown particularly clearly from Lunatscharsky's dispute with Metropolitan Wedensky... This book should be included in every library of atheism."

5. Recently published is a book entitled "Why we have broken with Religion". It is to contain narratives by people who have been believers, but have discarded their faith. There will be 36 narratives in all, narratives from the years 1957-58 published in various papers and periodicals in RSFSR (the Russian Soviet Republic), the Ukraine, White Russia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, etc. Some of the authors are old, some young, some have been clergy, others simple believers. "They have come to atheism by very different paths, so that the book is of interest both to believers and to non-believers". (See page 23 below)

6. Special books deal with the problem of fasting, infant baptism, church weddings, Communion, etc. One booklet is entitled "The truth about Baptists and Evangelical Christians"; another describes Jehovah's Witnesses as "a contra-revolutionary sect which carries on imperialist activities under the mask of religion". A book by E.G. Filimonov on "The Humanism of the Sects" shows that the so-called "humanism" of the religious sects - "which preaches love of one's neighbour, even loving one's class-enemies - is incompatible with the Communist ethic and harmful to the campaign to suppress the exploitation of man by man."

USSR

Religion and politics

"We must react when religion is used as a means of justifying imperialist policy". This is a quotation from the magazine "Novoe Wremia" (February, 1959) published by the Moscow publishing house "Trud".

"According to the imperialist powers it is not power politics but atheism which prevents the solution of the great international problems". American propaganda therefore takes on an increasingly religious air. The magazine states that the American declarations on foreign policy refer more and more "to faith in God".

The prophets of this faith in God are mainly to be found among Washington diplomats, such as John Foster Dulles.

Formerly people said: "A woman turns to God when she has been rejected by the devil." Mr. Dulles, however, is in a different position: in his imperialist policy he makes God and religion servants of the devil!

Dulles simply attributed an old-English proverb to Lenin; "Promises are like pie-crust - made to be broken".

Lenin never said anything of the kind.

Imperialist policy misuses religion in order to prove that (according to this saying attributed to Lenin) the atheist Soviet government does not feel bound by any agreement.

"Our faith in God is the most effective means of facing the challenge of this godless materialistic communism" - says a declaration by one of the Washington diplomats.

Our answer is: This faith in God is simply faith in their own government.

This point of view entirely ignores the fact that no world problem can be discussed without the participation of both the capitalist and the socialist states.

"Experience teaches us and our reason tells us that such cooperation is possible and indispensable."

When do the diplomats (in this case in Washington) resort to religion? In order to sabotage cooperation with the socialist states "because they are godless and therefore do not respect any agreement?"

A realist like Mr. Churchill expressed the opinion that "no government has ever really fulfilled its obligations".

However, "it is a fact, which cannot be denied either by invoking of God or the devil" that the Soviet government does fulfil its obligations.

No, "atheism is no obstacle to the conclusion and fulfilment of international agreements".

But is religion, in so far as it is claimed by political activists, any guarantee for the fulfilment of international agreements? The expression, that a treaty is only a scrap of paper came from the mouth of a Christian chancellor. What is the use of Christian vows and pledges, if the Church helps people to liberate themselves from oaths and obligations?"

USSR

Why we have broken with religion

The book of 211 pages published under the above title by the official agency "Gospolitizdat" received special mention in last February's edition of the party organ "The Communist".

This new book of militant atheism, "The Communist" comments, comprises reports by thirty people who until a short while ago still believed in a God. Their reports reveal why these Soviet people had to turn away from religion.

The writers of the reports are for the most part former priests of the Orthodox and Roman-Catholic Church, prebyters of different sects, monks, religious instructors and simple Christians and among them people "who have sought refuge in God for years".

But among them there are also boys and girls who were born in the Soviet Union but have "fallen victims to religious prejudice".

"They found it difficult to break with religion".

They have all "gone the long way of a painful and vain search for religious truth", until "life itself convinced them that religion is an expression of spiritual servitude that dulls human consciousness and prevents people from taking an active part in the constitution of the new Communist social order."

The basic attitude of religion is essentially different from that of science and the materialist ideology...

"The Communist" adds: "If we examine the reports of these former spiritual leaders and Christians more closely, we see that all these people have become atheists in entirely different ways. But all of them have received the same impulse for the step: our Soviet social order..."

The concrete reality of the Soviet social order and their direct experience of it "led them to realize that it is not God but the masses who make history", that "belief in supernatural forces, the belief in the effectiveness of obsolete religious tradition is a serious mistake".

One convert to materialism writes as follows: "In turning to all those people who still believe in God, I only hope that they will find their way as soon as possible out of the obscurity and lies of religion" and "to see the world as it is", without the intervention of non-existent supernatural forces... Look how Soviet people are transforming nature... are creating a brighter, better future for all people. If only the Christians would realize "that Soviets do not pin their hopes on unrealisable blessedness in the life hereafter, but try to create human happiness on earth through direct personal commitment."

One of the main reasons for renouncing religion is said to be the desire for active co-operation in the construction of Socialism. The greatness and beauty of life find expression in the heroic efforts of the workers in the factories to extend industry and agriculture, and to advance scientific and cultural achievements.

"Every promise of a life hereafter is a fraud; it is an attempt to keep people from active, political commitment for the good of the nation".

Former Christians have come to this conclusion "after long inner struggles and doubts and are now giving us a detailed report about it". They tell how "religion robs Man of his true feeling, transforms life on earth into a trauma, a trance, a dream of happiness in the midst of misfortune; but no effort is made to overcome misfortune; it has to be borne quietly in the hope of a life hereafter."

Thus J.I. Meresij, formerly an Orthodox monk, bitterly complains that the best years of his youth were spent in a monastery. Church bells and psalmodising prayers accompanied his young life which was robbed step by step of all joy until it finally shrivelled. In the sinful world outside, a new life was being built up... Nature was submitting to strong-minded, bold men... Yes, there in the sinful world happiness, joy of life, the victory of high ideals were victorious whereas in the world of religion, of prayer for redemption, joy was stifled in suffering, in spiritual poverty, in the self-tormenting grief over one's sins.

Speaking of Soviet youth, Meresij says "that admittedly it has accomplished much and has done far more than he has himself".

Similar conclusions were reached by Z.S. Tolstyko, a Catholic, A.A. Golovko, an Old Believer, G.K. Tofan, a Jehovah's Witness, as well as by I.P. Perovskij, a Seventh-Day Adventist and all those who "have found the courage to face reality and to condemn their own religious errors without mercy."

The scientific achievements of modern times lead Christians to realize in growing measure that "truth does not lie in religion but in science... the results of which undermine the belief in God and sweep away all superstition and prejudice".

"To throttle reason - is one of the obvious tasks of the clergy; illiteracy, obscurantism and lack of culture are the ground on which thrive ideas of a God, the expectation of miracles and the Last Judgment, etc..."

The theologians themselves knew quite well, of course, that religious books contain a lot of nonsense, many mistakes and many contradictions.

The Christian theologian, Augustin, wrote: "If the authority of the Church did not compel me, I would not believe in the Gospel myself."

Even in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" a Russian Orthodox theologian wrote regretfully "it is difficult to find one's bearings amidst all these accusing voices and to explain and classify all the variations of the Gospel..."

One of the reasons which led former clergy and Christian laymen to break with religion was stated to be indignation at the hypocrisy of the clergy (priests and pastors alike). Life had made them realize "that the clergy as a whole did not believe in God but mocked at the Scriptures".

At the same time the clergy urge Christians not to acquire possessions on earth but "to live like birds under the sky", as "only the poor would enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

At the same time the Church is rich. The Vatican is said to have stored up 11 thousand million dollars in its Treasury, i.e. more gold than England (5 thousand million dollars), France (1400 million dollars), Italy (700 million dollars). The Vatican is beaten only by the USA whose Treasury contains 25 thousand million dollars. Once the Church in Russia also had an enormous capital... its priests were among the richest capitalists in the country. But even in the USSR the clergy have a sizeable income, "which they quite often conceal from the taxation authorities".

A.V. Sozinov, a former graduate of the Moscow theological seminary, writes: "All these venerable Fathers know from the Gospel that it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Do they not fear unnecessary luxury and the illegal hoarding of thousands of roubles, by tax evasion? So even they reckon that life on earth is better than the hope of a life hereafter..."

The "venerable Fathers have long renounced keeping certain commandments of the Gospel which should guide the Church... I have convinced myself that most of the clergy only pay lip-service to God and only serve Him for financial reasons."

USSR

"V Teniotakh Baptistov"
(in the snare of the Baptists)

is the title of an essay attacking the Baptist Church, published by the "Stroitel'naya Gazeta" (Moscow) of March 4th, 1959. Its contents may be summarised as follows:

"Where is Wolodia?" ask the members of the Zaporoschsk choir anxiously, just before the evening concert in the "House of Culture". Wolodia is one of the best voices in the choir. "Where can he have got to? He's usually so punctual". Just then Wolodia appears, clearly in a bad temper. He is unusually pale and his lips are tightly shut. When asked "What's the matter with you" he replies crossly, "I can't take part in your concert"... "What??" "We are not allowed to", replies Wolodia. The members of the choir, including Wolodia's wife, Raissa, all crowd round him trying to persuade him that he has simply got to sing, as a pledged member of the choir. Wolodia replies, "All right then, I'll sing today, but never again"...

The concert was not as good as usual, Wolodia sang badly... and then a strange thing happened. While the balalaika group was performing, the conductor of the concert, Sitzermann, noticed Wolodia sitting behind the stage murmuring to himself with folded hands. "What are you doing here?" asked Sitzermann. "I'm praying to God to forgive me for the sin that I have deliberately committed by singing at this concert ..."

Wolodia never took part in any of the activities of the Zaporoschsk workers' club again.

What had happened to Wolodia?

"The contrast between old and new is more striking in Zaporoschsk than in any other town in the Soviet Union. There are miserable huts right on the wide new road called after Lenin, and in them religious life still finds shadowy expression."

Wolodia is 30 years old, the son of a worker, and earns his living in the machine-factory of Zaporoschaluminstroï, where he was respected by his fellow-workers as one of the best workers. Wolodia loved his wife and his daughter, Nelly; "it seemed as if nothing could destroy the happiness of his family life. Until suddenly..."

His wife noticed that he became very silent, and no longer showed any fatherly affection for his little daughter. Raissa is a book-keeper in the House of Soviet Culture. For a time she was glad her husband was so reserved, because she had to type invoices until late in the evenings. But then she grew uneasy. And when she bought her husband a lovely silk shirt, which he had always wanted, Wolodia said, "What did you buy that for? Don't think of the body; think of the soul!"

Raissa grew more and more perplexed about her husband's attitude, until the evening of the concert described above. Finally Wolodia told his wife that for more than a year he had been a member of the Baptist congregation. "Come and join us too", he said to his wife, "and become reconciled with God". "How can you suggest such a thing?" replied Raissa, firing up. "You are an intelligent person, and an active member of Soviet society, and suddenly you start believing in this nonsense. Aren't you ashamed to tell me, and the comrades?" Raissa burst into tears.

"The preacher was right", said Wolodia. "He warned us that those nearest to us would prove the bitterest enemies of the Baptists. Everything earthly has ceased to exist for us, because our hearts are up there" (Wolodia pointed to the ceiling). And then he began to sing a chorale.

His family and friends had to give up trying to persuade Wolodia; the Baptist obscurantism had penetrated into him too deep. All their efforts to liberate him were useless.

Raissa was desperately worried. For ten years she had lived in harmony with her dear husband, and now he had become a living corpse. Their family life was completely destroyed.

Then Wolodia disappeared altogether. He is said to be living in Kirov now. Why did he go to Kirov? So as to spread the poison which had been instilled into him himself. Some of the Baptists accompanied him, to say good-bye.

How could such a thing happen, asks the "Stroitel'naia Gazeta". How could a model foreman fall into the clutches of the Baptists? It is because the Baptists are regarded as harmless eccentrics who have the right to believe what they like. Some people maintain that the Baptists do no one any harm ... They don't drink, they don't smoke, they help each other. All that is good. And if the Baptists believe in God, and in an after-life with paradise and hell, etc., that is their own personal affair...

It is a great mistake to believe this, states the "Stroitel'naia Gazeta", for through their belief in a life hereafter the Baptists unsettle people and undermine their enthusiasm for socialism. It is true, they cooperate actively in extending the big aluminium works at Zaporoschsk; but this does not prevent them from discussing religion with their work-mates.

Very quickly the conversation turns from the earthly matters (with which they are ostensibly concerned) to heavenly ones, so that some of their fellow-workers fall under their influence. The people responsible for this are the party-leaders, because they are too indifferent about religion, and its prejudices. The people are still thirsting for scientific enlightenment. They want to know more about the future possibilities of the Sputnik, and whether people will be able to fly to the moon.

When asked if they are interested in anti-religious lectures, people promptly answer "Rather!" ...

Conclusion: "the anti-religious propaganda is not sufficiently well organised. The Communist groups are not provided with adequate literature about atheism. On the other hand one hears rumours about religious miracles which are said to have occurred, and a certain woman called Raissa (who is purported to be a saint) has prophesied that the end of the world is at hand. So isn't it perfectly obvious that the dark men of religion in Zaporoschsk are poisoning the minds of their fellow-men?"

USSR

"Pravda" attacks Jehovah's Witnesses

The increasing activity of Jehovah's Witnesses, a sect which is prohibited in the Soviet Union, is sharply attacked by "Pravda". According to this paper, Jehovah's Witnesses are becoming increasingly active in the districts of Kasan, Irkutsk, Tomsk and in the Western Ukraine. The paper says, it is impossible to remain indifferent to the renaissance of this force of darkness. According to "Pravda" another sect "of Amercian origin" is also gaining influence, namely the Seventh Day Adventists. The paper urges the need for greater vigilance in face of "these evangelists, who are agents of foreign espionage and war-mongers".

USSR

New Soviet monthly criticizes
anti-religious propaganda

A new Soviet monthly entitled "Sovety Deputatov Trudiaschtchikh" (The Workers' Deputies' Advisor) expresses itself as follows on the question of religion (April 4th, 1959).

As usual, the problem of religion is to the fore. The churchmen (Tserkovniki) are not wasting time, whereas the deputies of the Soviet workers never open their mouths. Why is this? It is partly because 'we don't know how to tackle this problem. But there is another obstacle, which is more serious: we don't know how to deal with church people properly, nor how to answer their questions about God and religion. We must be honest: we do not all have a clear concept of what religion is, and what are its roots and its dogmas."

Religion is a cunning enemy of the workers... It destroys their reason and kills their joy in living. The workers' deputies must therefore do something about it; they must organise active propaganda for atheism.

"We may as well be sincere about it: the struggle with religious error is a very hard one..."

"Our anti-religious propaganda does not in any way contradict the fact that in the USSR religion is a personal affair. Atheism has no desire to hurt the feelings of believers in any way. It

has no intention of exerting pressure or passing legislation to make atheism compulsory. It wants to convince people through friendly discussion, and to show up the senselessness of religion through scientific proof."

The workers' deputies must not be afraid, therefore, that they may be blamed if they energetically carry on propaganda for the systematic enlightenment of the workers.

USSR The trade union organisations and scientific
propaganda for atheism

We quote from the address delivered by W.W. Grischin, President of the Soviet Trade Union Congress, at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow on the 23rd March, 1959:

"The trade union organisations must pay far more attention to scientific propaganda for atheism. In some trade union groups the importance of this task is under-estimated, and the members are lax in performing it... There are not enough good lectures and addresses on atheism, and the number of atheist publications of general interest leaves much to be desired. What is needed is a drive to intensify the atheist education of the workers."

CZECHOSLOVAKIA Hiroshima - an appeal to the Churches to repent

From January 22nd to 23rd a conference of all the Czech Churches which are members of the Christian Peace Conference was held in Prague. It was attended by 200 church representatives, preachers and church-workers in Czechoslovakia. It was opened by the President of the Synod, Dr.V. Hajek, who is Chairman of the Czech Ecumenical Council and of the Christian Peace Conference.

The Conference stressed two main suggestions for which it had assumed responsibility from the first Conference held in December 1957. It recalled the tragedy of Hiroshima and urged the churches in Czechoslovakia and other countries all over the world to take action as a sign of their repentance, and thus to prepare the ground for a World Conference of Churches which would not merely express hopes, but which would have sufficient authority to pronounce a decisive message on the question of atomic weapons. The conference also turned its attention to the cold war and stressed the senselessness of this basic evil of our time, which constitutes a grave menace. The Czech churches expressed gratitude that so many eminent people all over the world today are stressing the need for repentance for Hiroshima, and urging the churches to convene a world congress, and to stop the cold war. This has encouraged the Czech churches to intensify their efforts to continue their task.

Declaration of the Conference

We, delegates from the Czech churches which are members of the Christian Peace Conference, fully realise the seriousness of the present international tension which is the result of the division into a Western and Eastern bloc. We wish to express our sincere endeavour to be true peacemakers (Matt. 5: 9). We feel it is our responsibility to speak and not to hold our peace at this time (Acts 18: 9).

The primary duty of all men of goodwill at the present time is to do their utmost to avoid war, which would inevitably develop into an atomic war with all its disastrous effects, ending in the extinction of life and of civilisation. In permitting man to discover the secret of atomic energy and to penetrate into space, God did not intend man to use that energy for self-destruction, but in order to live more happily and in order to fulfil His will more adequately on earth. God wants us to turn the existing weapons into a means of enriching human life (Micha 4: 3-4; Ezekiel 39: 8-10).

I. Realising our responsibility for the world, for our brothers and sisters who also live in Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in other countries, we are convinced that atomic warfare cannot under any circumstances be regarded as a means of protecting what is good. The use of atomic weapons excludes all possibility of distinction between good and bad, for it kills and maims everyone without distinction.

The application of methods of mass destruction in order to annihilate whole nations is equivalent to a revolt against the sovereignty of God, for He alone is the Lord of life and death. Any human interference in the realm of God's sovereignty is sinful, according to God's law. Every war is therefore a sin of revolt against God.

II. We set out in the firm conviction that everyone all over the world (both in the Eastern and in the Western bloc) is longing for peace. But the world will not attain peace unless people are ready to make sacrifices for it and to refrain from further preparations for war. We therefore appeal for the cessation of the "cold war".

We have noted with gratitude that the USSR has given proof of its good will by stopping atomic tests. As citizens we are convinced of the honesty of the peace-efforts of the representatives of our state, and as members of Christian churches we wish to extend the same message in brotherly love to all Christians and all other people living under different social régimes, so as to increase mutual confidence.

III. We reject the view that Christianity and civilisation must be defended with atomic weapons.

We reject the view that the stock-piling of atomic weapons intimidates the enemy and guarantees understanding in a divided world. The manufacture of atomic weapons increases the danger that the power with which God has entrusted man for promoting life will be misused for destructive purposes. Fear of stock-piled atomic weapons will never lead to confidence and understanding.

IV. We recall with deep regret that the atomic age started when the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima, causing enormous loss of life. The church must be on its guard. Therefore it must not remain silent in face of preparations for war which would multiply this evil. For this would be betraying the mission of the church; it would constitute a sin against the Creator and the creation. We are therefore appealing for repentance and a change of heart. We do not want to push the responsibility for this act onto others; but we insist that the problems of mankind must be solved in a spirit of love and by peaceful methods, not with atomic weapons.

We therefore identify ourselves with the decisions of the Commission of the Christian Peace Conference adopted at Debrecen (October 31st to November 2nd, 1958) and express our thanks for the work it has so far done. We assure it of our full confidence and willingness to cooperate and actively assist it, and we request it:

- a) to take the necessary steps to ensure that the anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima be observed as a day of repentance by all Christians and
- b) to continue its efforts to convene a Christian Peace Council which, in the name of Christians all over the world, would condemn the use of nuclear energy for military purposes and help to strengthen the confidence between the nations.

V. We wish to seize every opportunity, in our families, in our congregations, in our cities and in our places of work, to prove our desire for peace. We wish to make an appeal for truth and sincerity, for justice and meekness, for charity and forgiveness, and to help in the promotion of everything that is conducive to a happy life and to the common welfare.

We assume responsibility for spreading and popularising the message of peace, and for combatting the sin of atomic warfare, through the church press, from our pulpits, in schools, and on every other opportunity, so that all the members of our congregations will accept our peace-message and promote it through their prayers and in action.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Commission on religious liberty

The Study Division of the Czech Ecumenical Council has appointed a Commission to study the question of religious liberty. Dr. K. Reichel, Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, has been appointed Chairman of the Commission and Dr. K. Gabris, Professor at the Slovakian Evangelical Faculty of Theology, as Secretary. Among the members of the Commission are representatives from all the churches which are members of the Ecumenical Council. The Commission met in Prague on January 15th, 1959. A report on its discussions was given by the Secretary at the meeting of the Ecumenical Council on January 21st, 1959.

The discussions of the Commission were devoted to a draft statement prepared by the Secretary, which consists of five paragraphs dealing with the following problems:

Paragraph 1 introduces the study of religious liberty and explains the conditions under which positive results may be obtained.

Paragraph 2 deals with the historical aspects. During the history of the Church, the problem of religious liberty has assumed different forms. A new approach to the question of religious liberty was created through the impact of Christianity with the Roman State, and subsequently through the conflict of Protestantism with the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia have undergone considerable persecution during the course of history. This has led them to a new understanding of religious liberty.

Paragraph 3 deals with the concept, the nature and the meaning of religious liberty. By means of a series of definitions, it tries to distinguish between the false and correct factors, and to arrive at an understanding of the nature of religious liberty which would correspond to the Christian mission but which would at the same time be acceptable in a given social order and compatible with the legislation in force there, and which would be in accordance with the moral, industrial and cultural progress of society.

Paragraph 4, which seeks to define the present problems of religious liberty, devotes special attention to examples of its violation or promotion all over the world, both by individuals and by religious and non-religious bodies.

Paragraph 5 analyses the existing declarations and state constitutions, charters and church-orders in so far as they deal with religious liberty.

The Commission is continuing its work on these problems through study groups within the different member churches. The findings will be submitted to the Czech Ecumenical Council and possibly also to the World Council of Churches.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The conference of European churches

The first Conference of European Churches, held at Nyborg (Denmark) from January 6th to 9th, 1959, aroused great interest among Protestants in Czechoslovakia. This interest was partly due to the ecumenical traditions of the Reformation in Bohemia,

and partly to the present efforts of the Czech churches to promote friendly relations between churches and nations, and to establish an effective barrier against the menace of atomic warfare. The discussions of the Commissions and the general meetings at Nyborg were attended by five delegates who took active part in the discussions, and reported on them to the Czech churches. These delegates were grateful for the opportunity provided by the Conference to make friends and have friendly discussions. They were very glad that all the churches wanted to continue to cooperate in tasks which originate not only from their obedience to the Lord of the Church but also from their common heritage of European culture. The Czech churches want to go on helping to promote reconciliation in a divided world, on the basis of this cooperation. They therefore hope that certain features of the conference will prove merely temporary (features which gave the impression that undue importance was given to non-theological and non-ecclesiastical factors such as the appointment of officers, choice of speakers, etc.).

The Czech churches will do everything in their power to ensure that nothing weakens the hard-won basis of cooperation between the churches of Europe in the present crucial situation. At the close of the conference Bishop Høgsbro pointed out how often Europe has been a focus of division. Vestigia terrent. May the past teach us how to avoid future mistakes!

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

First woman pastor in Czechoslovakia

Full responsibility for a parish has been entrusted to a woman-pastor for the first time in the Evangelical Church in Slovakia. (Augsburgian Confession). Pastor Darina Bancikova has begun her ministry in a parish in the south of Slovakia which is bi-lingual (speaking both Slovak and Hungarian).

The ordination of women was introduced many years ago in the Evangelical Church in Slovakia, but until now women have worked only as assistant pastors.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Publication of Professor Hromadka's "Concise Dogmatics"

Professor D. Dr. Hromadka's "Concise Dogmatics" has been published by the Czech Protestant publishing house "Kalich" in Prague. The exact title of the whole book is "The Message of the Approach to Man", and the sub-title "Introduction to the Study of the Holy Scriptures and Church Confessions". The whole work comprises 20 chapters and is split up into five main parts:
1) The Word in its approach to Man; 2) The Word about Man;
3) The Word became flesh; 4) The Church in its approach to Man;
5) Expectation in hope. The book begins with a short introduction and closes with a longer epilogue.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Student attends confession before
examination on marxism

"We must admit that in the sphere of atheist propaganda we have still achieved very little" states a youth leader in his report to the Third Congress of the Czech Youth Union. His report is published in the Czech youth paper "Mlada Fronta".

According to this report, the majority of students in Czechoslovakia still hold to their religious convictions. The writer quotes the case of a girl-student who had received excellent marks in the examination on the subject of "Marxism and Religion". But after the examination she told her friends that she thought the reason why she had done so well was that she had been to Confession just beforehand. "If our students try to overcome their nervousness by amusing themselves, we have no objection," says this youth-leader. "But if students go to Church and make confession immediately before an examination on Marxism, this shows a serious incompatibility between what they think and what they do."

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

"Gospel legends and their meaning"

"Rude Pravo" states that the first volume of "an important series of publications on atheist literature" has been published by the state publishing-house of Czechoslovakia. They are "researches" undertaken by the Russian Professor I.A. Kryweljow on "Gospel Legends and their Meaning". The author examines the Gospels and points out the "discrepancies and the historical and geographical errors" contained in them. He comes to the conclusion that the Gospels are "a collection of legends which have been trimmed up by the Church for its own purposes."

The new series is to include other books containing atheist propaganda, one of them dealing with the present policy of the Vatican, another with the question "Is religion eternal?"

POLAND

News about the work of the Protestant
Academy in Poland

The January issue of the magazine of the Reformed Church in Poland publishes detailed information about the Protestant Academy in Poland.

The Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Warsaw was founded in 1920. With a period of interruption during the German occupation it existed until 1954. From 1945 to 1954 it eked out a very miserable and difficult existence in the badly damaged city, with only a tiny fragment of its big library left. To begin with it found shelter in the ruins of the destroyed Lutheran church in Warsaw, later on in various municipal buildings

which had once belonged to the Protestant Church, and finally at Chyllice, near Warsaw. In 1954 the Protestant Faculty was separated from the university by a government decree and was declared an independent college under the name of the Christian Academy at Chyllice. The Protestant faculty of this new Academy was supplemented by an Old-Catholic faculty, and in 1957 by a Greek-Orthodox faculty. The Academy is recognized and administered by the State and possesses all university rights, including the right to degrees.

At the Protestant faculty there are the following chairs: Old Testament, New Testament, Church History with two branches: a) Critical Theology, b) History of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Poland, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology. For each branch there is a special institute.

Furthermore, the three faculties arrange joint courses in general subjects, such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Russian and German language, as well as comparative religions.

There are also preparatory courses on the following subjects: Polish language and Polish culture, world history, mathematics, geography, biology. These preparatory courses are not only for theological students but also for lay people, such as participants in the different seminars held by the churches. The students can only study theology and prepare themselves after having passed these preparatory courses for an M.A.

At the moment there are 26 lecturers and 91 students (47 Protestants, 17 Old Catholics and 15 Greek Orthodox students) at the Academy.

CHINA

Church news from China

According to the annual report on China in the International Review of Missions there are today three theological colleges for pupils who have attended modern schools, i.e. at Nanking, Peking and Shanghai. The demand for Bibles is steadily increasing. The sale of Bibles is organized by a central office in Shanghai, which has several branches in other towns. During the period between 1949 and 1955 there have been 43 new editions of biblical books in the Chinese language. A new translation of the Bible into Chinese based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts has been started. Another proof of the fact that people in China today are interested in the Bible is the publication of a Hebrew-Chinese dictionary and a Chinese concordance (based on the English concordance by Strang) and a book on "Greek Terms in the New Testament" written by a Chinese scholar, Dr. A. Tscheng. Furthermore Christian publishing houses in China have published the "Pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyan and a commentary on the Gospel according to St. John by William Temple, the former Archbishop of the Church of England.

According to the figures published by the International Review of Missions, the membership of the Protestant Churches in China decreased between 1949 and 1957, although the Churches of native origin like the "Church of the True Jesus" or the "Independent Church" fared better than the Churches originally connected with the West. In January 1958 delegates of the Chinese Protestant Churches attended a Church meeting at Budapest. At last year's Lambeth Conference in London there was no delegate from the Anglican Church in China.

HUNGARY

Tenth Anniversary of World Peace Congress celebrated by Hungarian churches

The Protestant Churches in Hungary, joined by the Orthodox Churches of the country, held a peace rally, on the 23rd of January, in the Main Hall of the Reformed Theological Academy at Budapest. The churches recalled with thanksgiving the first decade of the world peace movement. The peace rally was attended by several hundred pastors and priests from all parts of the country. The opening address was delivered by Bishop Lajos Vető, President of the Lutheran General Church, who also presided over the proceedings. The Presidium included the leaders of all the participating churches.

In his jubilee address Bishop Elemér Györy, Ministerial Vice President of the General Convent of the Reformed Church, outlined the spectacular development of the initiatives first made ten years ago at Wroslaw, Poland, which have grown into the integrated movement of a vast peace camp that encircles the globe. It is on the basis of their faith that the Christian churches participate in this movement. "No other religion or party could give that distinctive tone and colour which Christianity represents in the world peace movement", said the Bishop. He welcomed the fact that, in the cause of defending peace, members of the Protestant and the Orthodox Churches and even the Roman Catholics have reached agreement. "We think it desirable that a universal synod be held to deal with the danger of an atomic war that threatens humanity with total annihilation", said the Bishop. In the concluding part of his speech he extended greetings, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the world peace movement, to the World Peace Council and the National Peace Council, expressing the readiness of the churches to give their further services to this cause.

After the Bishop's speech Protoierei Dr. Feriz Berki, Administrator of the Hungarian Orthodox Church, proposed the resolution.

After a number of speeches the meeting unanimously passed a declaration which was then signed by the Presidium of the Reformed Convent, the two Bishops of the Lutheran Church, the President of the Baptist Church, the Superintendent of the Methodist Church, the Administrator of the Hungarian Orthodox Church, the Archdean of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Dean of the Roumanian Orthodox Church, the delegate of the Old Catholic Church, the President of the Council of Free Churches and the Ministerial Notary General of the Unitarians.

The declaration points out that the supreme common moral treasure of humanity is peace, the defence of which is our Christian duty. The movement launched by the World Peace Council has always welcomed in the ranks of its fighters believing people, ecclesiastical and religious personalities.

The declaration reviews with gratitude the past years and the fruits of the churches' peace service, then it states:

"Apart from the small and ever diminishing group of those who fabricate theological arguments to justify atomic warfare and the cold war, no representative of Christian circles has ever dared to attempt, as an open advocate of military solutions, to rally partisans for himself. The declaration protests against the arming of Western Germany with atomic weapons, against the rocket bases under construction in England, Western Germany, Italy and elsewhere, the English and American experiments with atomic weapons and rockets, the system of military bases and the artificially created lack of confidence. We do not wish to see the continuance of a warlike atmosphere and the intensification of international tensions. We wholeheartedly wish to see that the immense moral and material energies expended today for military purposes be used for the building up of a better, healthier, more cultured, more just, more human and richer future for the good of all the peoples of the world."

Then the declaration explains how decisive has been the role played by the World Peace Council in transforming the moral public opinion of the world in favour of the idea of peace and against atomic politics. For this we offer thanksgiving to God, but we wholeheartedly thank also all those who have fought, in a true spirit and with dedication, for the cause of peace, above all, the leaders and workers of the World Peace Council.

Then the declaration goes on to emphasize that this jubilee year is a year not only of thanksgiving but also of hope. Our hopes are justified by the positive progress being made at the two Geneva conferences, by the achievements of science and technique, the peaceful use of atomic energy, a better knowledge of space, and the contacts, in a favourable atmosphere, between the leaders of the two great world powers in the interests of preparing for top level negotiations. Then the declaration, inspired by a sense of responsibility for the future of mankind, calls on the organizations, pastors and believers of the Christian churches to pray and work for peace; it appeals to the leaders of the peoples to dispel, by negotiations and by a search for peaceful solutions, the atmosphere of lack of confidence, suspicion and fear which is poisoning the life of the whole human race; it calls on all true friends of peace to intensify their efforts for the defence of peace; and finally appeals to the Protestant and Orthodox congregations of Hungary to respond to this declaration by public statements, teachings, intercessions, by undertaking tasks, by their initiatives and by readiness to cooperate with those working for the defence of peace.

The Relations between the Old Catholic Church and
the Orthodox National Churches

This question is discussed by Protohierei A. Sergeenko, a theological student, in the twelfth issue (1958) of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate."

After enumerating the various encounters which have taken place between Old Catholics and representatives of the "Greek Church" (i.e. the Orthodox Church) since the meeting in Munich in 1871, at Olten in 1872, at Bonn in 1874/75, etc. in order to examine the possibilities of union between the Old Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, the author gives a detailed analysis of the more recent discussions between the two Churches (especially those held in 1937/38 and in 1957).

A. Sergeenko's ideas may be summed up as follows. "The discussions revealed the necessity to define the attitude of the Old Catholic Church towards the question of the nature of the Church, the Sacraments, the veneration of the Virgin and of the saints, transsubstantiation and celibacy. The question of the "filioque" clause was not discussed, because the Conference of 1920 had erroneously assumed that it had been satisfactorily solved at the Conference held at Bonn in 1874. In actual fact, the discussion on the question of the "filioque" clause was continued between the St. Petersburg and the Rotterdam Commissions until 1908, whereas at Bonn in 1874/75 the Old Catholics had merely admitted that the inclusion of the "filioque" in the Creed was arbitrary, and that the "filioque" was therefore not a dogma."

The Old Catholics agree with the Orthodox in recognising "that the Founder of the Church is Our Lord Jesus Christ, who called the Apostles and promised them that the Holy Spirit should be bestowed upon them. This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. It was fulfilled through the formation of a Church which pursued the aims of a spiritual order by constantly remembering its Founder, Jesus Christ, who called the Apostles and promised them that the Holy Spirit should be bestowed upon them."

The Church is the fellowship of those who gather in one body by being re-born through baptism and through faith in Christ, the Head of the Church. The Spirit of God is at work in the Church, leading its members to the truth, uniting them in love, and enlightening them as His children.

The marks of the Church on earth are: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Its unity is expressed in the harmony of the basic order of its teaching, its worship and its church-order. Its holiness consists in winning men and women to a holy life, i.e. a life sanctified by God. Its catholicity consists in its calling as the home of the Holy Spirit, the guardian of truth, transmitting and spreading its influence to men and women in all times and places. Its apostolicity consists in its unbroken transmission of the threefold apostolic hierarchy.

Basing their statement on liturgical sources, the Old Catholics affirmed that they venerate the Virgin and the saints. They recognise the Sacraments, including the Sacrament of repentance, like the Orthodox Church.

According to the Old Catholic view, the term "transsubstantiation" is not always understood in the same way in the Orthodox Churches. The Old Catholics therefore do not consider it obligatory.

With regard to the possibility for ordained priests to marry, the Old Catholics firmly adhere to their practice (which permits priests and bishops to marry after ordination).

The discussions closed with a proposal (by Metropolitan Germanos of Greece) to set up two Commissions, one Orthodox, the other Old Catholic, and to inform the Patriarchate of Constantinople that the Old Catholics were ready to enter into further negotiations (with the Orthodox).

This was followed by a meeting at Bonn in 1931, which was attended by representatives of the churches of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Roumania, Cyprus, Greece and Serbia. The Old Catholics were represented by the three strongholds of the Old Catholic Church: in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany. This meeting was merely preparatory in character. The decision lay with a Preparatory Synod of the Orthodox Churches, which should have taken a decision in 1932. It was assumed that the "Utrecht Statement" formed the criterion for the Old Catholics.

The Old Catholics also stressed the fact that (like the Orthodox) they recognise the first seven Ecumenical Councils, and the decisions of the national church councils, which were afterwards approved by the Ecumenical Councils, and that they accept the Nicene-Constantinople Creed without the "filioque", but that they did not accept the baptismal creed nor the Apostles' Creed according to the Orthodox practice. They also approved the view that sacred tradition is an explanation and a completion of Holy Scripture. The non-canonical books are recognised as books of edification, and are therefore not regarded as apocryphas.

Agreement was reached with regard to the recognition of the Canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils. Basing their views mainly on St. Augustine, the Old Catholics brought in a clause stating that they recognise the Canons not in the letter but in the spirit of the Early Church, which is the authority and guardian of doctrine and ethics. The Church therefore takes precedence over Holy Scripture, and not vice versa. As God is the Father of all Christians, so the Church is their mother. "We could not believe if the Church itself had not transmitted the Christian message to us. The doctrine of the Church must be based on Scripture and tradition."

The body with the highest authority is the Ecumenical Council (Sobor). But even the Church can only teach the doctrines which are based on Scripture and tradition. At the same time the Old Catholics re-affirm that they recognise all seven Sacraments, although they attach special importance to Baptism (admission into the Church) and to Holy Communion (as the grace whereby believers are united).

After indicating some further details, Protohierei Sergeenko comments: "The questions of the laying on of hands, and of the marriage of the clergy, remain controversial. The Old Catholics insist that in cases of absolute necessity a single Bishop may consecrate another as Bishop ..."

Finally reference is made to the meetings between Orthodox and Old Catholics in Munich and in Rheinfelden (Switzerland) in 1957. The Orthodox delegate at Munich was a Greek; but the delegate at Rheinfelden was Archimandrite Serafin Rodionoff, representing the Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate in Western Europe.

The ecumenical character of this meeting was further stressed by the fact that it received a special message from His Holiness, the Patriarch of Constantinople, wishing it every success.

of numbers 1 and 2

A) Orthodox

Church memberships, statistics	1,	19
Church membership, how many renounce their faith? ...	1,	19
Moscow Patriarchate reports on the Orthodox Church ..	1,	20
Ex-uniatic churches in Western USSR	1,	21
Reconstruction of churches	1,	32
The place of preaching in the Church in the USSR	2,	1
Preaching in the light of the Orthodox Church	2,	3
Easter night at the Theological Seminary of Kiev	2,	10
Restoration of Orthodox churches	2,	13
Card-Index of old Russian churches	2,	15

By Metropolitan Nicolai on Psalm 70	1,	35
From a sermon on a Christian prayer	2,	5
A sermon on repentance	2,	7

Protestant churches in the USSR Carpathian Ukraine ..	1,	8
Evangelical Christian Baptists' growing membership ..	1,	20
Armenia, 200 bibles received from Bible Society	1,	20
Only two Lutheran Churches in the Soviet Union	2,	15

What is the sin against the Holy Spirit?..... 2, 8

A) Inside the USSR

Conflict of religion and atheism	1,	1
Atheist propaganda in the former Baltic States	1,	23
Communist Party's attitude to religion	1,	24
Red Army newspaper asks why does religion survive?...	1,	26
Philosophical journal on cosmological Christian and "scientific" purposes	1,	27
Critical essays on the Bible	1,	28
" " "	1,	34
Reactionary use of art for religious purposes	1,	29
Priest turns atheist	1,	30
Religion in the family	1,	30
Science and death	1,	31

Religion and the future	1, 31
Wealth of the Vatican	1, 33
"Modern Catholicism"	1, 34
Atheist propaganda	2, 16
Secular press in Soviet Russia makes use of religious expressions	2, 17
Writer Jan Niedre: Reply to an anonymous letter from Riga (Latvia)	2, 18
Atheist publications planned for 1959	2, 20
Religion and politics	2, 22
Why we have broken with religion	2, 23
In the snare of the Baptists	2, 26
Pravda attacks Jehovah's Witnesses	2, 28
New Soviet monthly criticizes anti-religious propaganda	2, 28
The trade union organisations and scientific propaganda for atheism	2, 29

B) Outside the USSR

Bulgaria:

"Religion - the exploiter of the workers"	1, 13
"Religion - an obstacle to the fulfilment of plans ..	1, 14

Czechoslovakia:

Student attends confession before examination on marxism	2, 34
Gospel legends and their meaning	2, 34

Hungary:

The problem of Christian school-teachers	1, 14
--	-------

Poland:

"Scientific discussion" of religious questions	1, 16
--	-------

3) RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES OUTSIDE THE USSR:

Utrecht meeting with WCC representatives	1, 2
Nyborg, speech of Russian representatives at the Conference of European churches	1, 6
Czechoslovakia, visit of Czech Ecumenical delegates to the USSR	1, 7
Moscow, visa granted for Russian Orthodox priest	1, 23
The conference of European churches	2, 32
The Relations between the Old Catholic Church and the Orthodox National Churches	2, 38
.....	
.....	
.....	

4) CHURCH-LIFE IN EASTERN EUROPE OUTSIDE THE USSR:

Bulgaria:

Term opens at Theological Seminary, Sofia 1, 10
Restoration of Academy of St. Clement of Ochrida 1, 10
Report on WCC Central Committee 1, 10

Czechoslovakia:

New bishop of Lutheran Church in Slovakia 1, 9
Bible Exhibition in Prague 1, 9
First woman pastor in Czechoslovakia 2, 33
Commission on religious liberty 2, 32
Publication of Professor Hromadka's "Concise Dogmatics". 2, 33

Finland:

Orthodox Church in Finland celebrates fortieth anniversary 1, 9

Hungary:

Bishop Ordass translating play by Kaj Munk 1, 14
State subsidies for Hungarian churches 1, 15
Bishop Kaldy on relations with Lutheran World Federation 1, 15

Poland:

Baptist Preachers' Seminary to open 1, 15
Comments on Archbishop of Canterbury's statement on birth control 1, 15
News about the work of the Protestant Academy in Poland. 2, 34

Roumania:

10th anniversary of integration of the Uniate churches . 1, 16
Patriarch reported under arrest 1, 17
Church statistics 1, 17

Yugoslavia:

Patriarch's message to Disciples of Christ 1, 18

5) PEACE MOVEMENTS:

Bulgaria, Prof. Zankov attends World Peace Conference at Prague 1, 10
Bulgaria, Prof. Zankov's paper on work for peace in the Orthodox East 1, 11
Bulgaria, Church newspaper article on the Soviet Union and World Peace 1, 13
Hungary, tenth anniversary of World Peace Congress celebrated by Hungarian churches 2, 36
USSR, The Russian Orthodox Church's struggle for peace.. 2, 11

